

For Immediate Release

Contact:

March Is Disaster Preparedness Month

Statewide Severe Weather Drill Set for March 16

Recognizing the work Missouri's county and city emergency management directors perform to keep citizens safe from natural disasters such as the May 2003 tornadoes and severe weather or spring flooding, Governor Bob Holden proclaimed March as Disaster Preparedness Month. He also noted that the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and the National Weather Service (NWS) will conduct the **Statewide Severe Weather Tornado Drill at 1:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 16, 2004.** Every school, citizen and business is encouraged to participate in the drill by practicing seeking secure, save shelter from a "tornado".

The NWS will send out the severe weather drill using the actual TOR code. The Pleasant Hill Weather and the Springfield Forecasting Offices (WFO) will conduct an Amateur Radio operators exercise at 1:30 p.m. In the St. Louis area, Amateur Radio operators will participate in an exercise at 6:30 p.m. **If Missouri is experiencing statewide severe weather conditions, the National Weather Service will hold the statewide drill on the backup date, Thursday, March 18, 2004.**

Here are some terms every citizen should be aware of:

Tornado WATCH means watch the sky!

Tornado WARNING means seek shelter immediately.

SHELTER -- if you are at home, school or work, go immediately to an interior room with NO windows on the lowest possible floor. If you are at school or work **DO NOT GO** to a cafeteria, gymnasium or large interior open space because the roof might collapse. If you are in a **mobile home**, leave it immediately -- seek shelter in a nearby building or in a ditch. If you are **driving**, take shelter in a nearby building, in a ditch or low-lying area away from your car. **If you are outside, remember to cover your head with your arms, coat or blanket to protect yourself from flying debris.** Never try to out drive a tornado.

OVERPASSES Are NOT Safe -- An overpass's under-the-girder-type construction can cause a dangerous wind tunnel effect. This may cause the winds to be stronger and more focused underneath. This can also cause the overpass to be a collector of debris.

FLASH FLOODING or Water on the Road -- During a thunderstorm be aware that low-lying areas are prone to flash flooding. Never drive into water on the road. If your car stalls, get out of your car immediately and seek higher ground. It takes less than two feet of water to make your car float. Once floating downstream, your car can overturn trapping you inside.

A Flash Flood WATCH is issued when the meteorologist expects rainfall to be heavy enough to produce flash flooding. The amount of rainfall needed to produce flash flooding is dependent on several factors. The most important of these are terrain, wetness of the soil and the stages of the affected rivers or streams.

A Flash Flood WARNING is issued when flash flooding is imminent or already in progress. If you are in its path, move to higher ground immediately.

THUNDERSTORMS may produce flash floods. Stay out of dry creek beds during thunderstorms. If you live near a river or stream, listen for flash flood warnings.

LIGHTNING -Outside safety: If you are caught outside in a thunderstorm, get inside a building or a car. If you must stay outside, keep away from metal, like golf carts, motorcycles, fences, metal lines or pipes. Stay below ground level, away from hilltops, open beaches or fields. And most importantly stay away from open water. Duck and cover your head to lessen your chance of being struck by lightening. Stay on top of weather conditions when camping, swimming, fishing, golfing or enjoying other outdoors activities.

LIGHTNING – Inside safety: Each year lightning kills more Americans than tornadoes or hurricanes. If you are inside a building, or even a car, your chances of being struck by lightning are slim. For personal safety, stay away from windows, floor vents, and electronic equipment, especially the telephone or computer.